

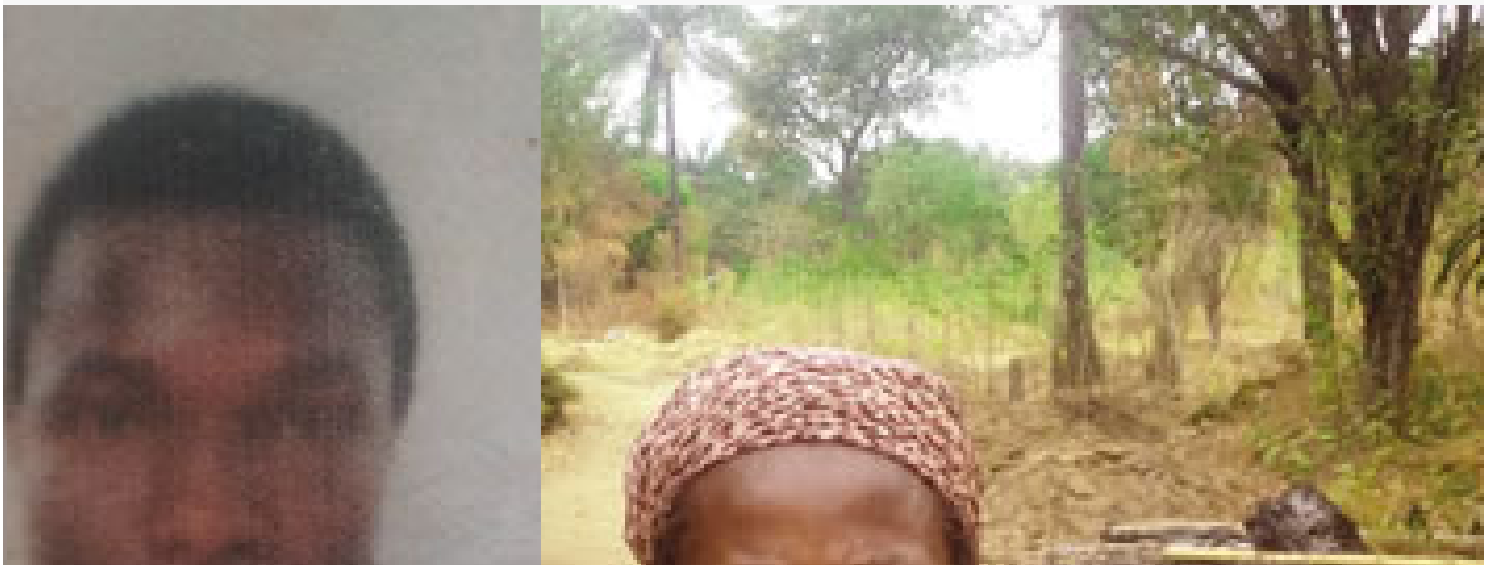
SATURDAY FEATURES

My son was healthy before dying in old woman's grave— Mother of Ebonyi mystery death victim

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yet to be completed grave. A strange, improbable tale. It sounds unbelievable. Yet this is a true story. The incident occurred in Azuegu (also known as New Jerusalem), a community in Umuhuali village, in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, on March 16, 2017.

The strange but sad tale is the story of Ifeanyi Nwafor, a 29-year-old, who would never have imagined he would end up dying inside the grave he was helping to prepare for the burial of the late elderly woman.

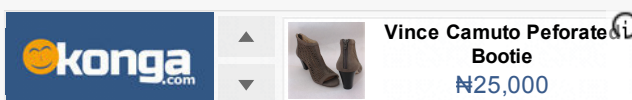


Reports of the incident initially appeared like a macabre, fantasy tale, but our correspondent was able to confirm the development during a visit to Azuegu, a sleepy, agrarian community, on Thursday.

Residents of the community were noticeably reluctant to discuss the incident with a stranger, and our correspondent observed that people were not willing to share information concerning the old woman whose grave Ifeanyi was helping to prepare when he met his untimely end.

Efforts by our correspondent to get the woman's family to talk were unsuccessful – it was apparent that the family members were not comfortable with the subject, which had, unsurprisingly, given rise to speculations and insinuations in the community.

But, posing as a 'government official' who was in the community to ascertain what actually happened, our correspondent was able to locate Ifeanyi's family house.



although
dusty ground.

A middle-aged woman, who eventually turned out to be Ifeanyi's mother, sat quietly with two other ladies under the shade of a tree within the compound.

Tears appeared in their eyes when our correspondent made enquiries concerning what happened to Ifeanyi, but the mother, who gave her name as Mrs. Bernadette Nwafor, put herself together to narrate the strange tale.

A day before the incident, Ifeanyi, a commercial bus driver, had gone with his elder brother to Nkalagu, the major town in the area, along Enugu-Abakaliki expressway, to repair his vehicle.

Later in the evening, Ifeanyi attended a wake-keep at the elderly woman's compound. The wake-keep came up on the eve of the woman's burial.

Ifeanyi stayed back after the wake-keep, and in the morning, joined other young men to dig the grave, where the old woman was to be buried.

Youths from the community, who volunteered to prepare the grave, were taking turns to enter the hole to dig. At a point, Ifeanyi entered the hole, but, just as he was starting to dig, he fell down, inside the yet to be completed grave, and died.

Others at the scene, who were shocked at the development, rushed Ifeanyi to a hospital, where he was confirmed dead.

Asked what could have caused his sudden death, his mother said Ifeanyi was an energetic young man. He was not sick, according to the woman.

She added that, although Ifeanyi might have taken some alcoholic drinks during the night vigil, he drank just like the other youths who participated in digging the grave.

The woman said she could not explain what happened to her son.



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getting there, we were told that Ifeanyi was dead.

“We asked them to tell us what happened, and we were told that he was digging the grave when he fell down and died inside the grave they were digging.

“He was strong, he was not sick and he was not a drunkard,” Ifeanyi’s mother said.

She further disclosed that, after he was confirmed dead at the hospital, Ifeanyi’s corpse was brought home, and buried the next day. That was a day after the burial of the woman whose grave he was helping to dig.

“He was rushed to the hospital, where he was confirmed dead. After that, he was brought home and buried the next day,” the mother said.

Apparently, an autopsy was not carried out on Ifeanyi’s remains in order to determine the cause of death.

But the woman explained that when Ifeanyi’s body was about to be buried, a large quantity of blood was discovered on the bed where he was kept after he was brought home from the hospital.

There was no open wound on Ifeanyi’s body.

“We noticed that he bled on the bed where he was kept. There was no wound on him but so much blood came out of his body. The clothes he was covered with were soaked with blood,” she disclosed.

Mrs. Nwafor said the family had already resigned to fate and have no intention of investigating what led to their son’s strange death.

Despite the development, she said there are no problems between them and the family of the elderly woman.

However, in the course of the interaction with members of Ifeanyi’s family, one of the ladies, who did not say much, kept asking suspiciously whether our correspondent was sent by the late old woman.



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she showed our correspondent her son's fresh grave – a mound of sand covered with dry sticks and leaves.

Feelers in the community suggest that the villagers are yet to come to terms with the strange manner of Ifeanyi's death.

The development has remained the talk of the town, about two weeks after.

Opinion is however divided on what could be the cause of the mysterious incident. Various phenomena, including fetish, spiritual, physical, and health factors, are being advanced as the cause of the young man's demise.

A member of the community, who did not wish to be named, said there was more to the incident than meets the eye.

"He (Ifeanyi) was not the only one that drank during the wake-keep, others also took alcohol and the drinks came from the same source. In fact, the youths normally drink while digging graves. There was nothing wrong with him until the moment he collapsed and died. There is more to it than meets the eye – it is not ordinary," the man said.

Asked to explain further, the man simply shook his head, and repeated his claim that there was more to the incident.

But our correspondent learnt that the elderly woman, whose grave Ifeanyi was digging when he died, was a Christian.

However, she was said to have converted to Christianity 'not so long ago'.

A youth, who identified himself as Ezenwa, said he was among those that participated in digging the grave, alongside the late Ifeanyi.

Ezenwa said there was no indication that Ifeanyi might be unfit to dig the grave before he suddenly collapsed and died.



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digs with the shovel when it happened.

“We still don’t understand what happened to him. It was shocking. One minute he was full of life, the next minute he was lying dead inside the grave,” Ezenwa said.

While the jury is still out over what actually caused Ifeanyi’s mysterious death, his immediate family is facing the harsh realities occasioned by the loss of a bread winner.

“Life has been very difficult for us since Ifeanyi died. We are going through difficult times, we are facing serious challenges at the moment,” Ifeanyi’s mother explained.

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